

## Private donations have been sought to fund project, but some voters think government should foot the bill.

As the city embarks on dredging long-neglected areas of the harbor, required federal funding and approvals may not materialize before a critical deadline.

The obstacles threaten the city's first significant harbor dredging in more than 75 years, when the bay's sandbars were originally scooped out. Today, boaters often get stuck on shoals or can't leave their berths on low tide.

If harbor officials can't get the \$6.9-million project launched before mid-March, they risk losing landfill space at the Port of Long Beach and would have to spend millions more to dump polluted dirt inland.

"It's something that I'm working on and I'm very concerned about," Harbor Resources Manager Chris Miller said at last week's Tidelands Management Committee meeting. "We're doing everything that we can."

City leaders and lobbyists are pressing contacts in the Army Corps of Engineers and Congress.

But federal resource management officials are still reviewing the project, said Christopher Bognanno, spokesman for **Rep. John Campbell** (R-Newport Beach).

The plans also have to be authorized by Congress, he added, and the timeline is uncertain.

Council members have suggested they declare an emergency, which could allow the city to act alone.

"We need to be very creative," Mayor Nancy Gardner said, "and be willing to take some risks."

## **Donations for dredging**

Councilman Mike Henn has turned to individuals to raise funds for the project, which would target areas around the eastern end of Lido Isle, north of Balboa Island and other channels.

But since the City Council approved Henn's idea of private donations in mid-December, he hasn't received any checks.

"I'm sounding out various constituencies in the harbor," Henn said last week, "to try and make an assessment about how much enthusiasm there is for private donations for the project."

But some boaters — even those who could directly benefit from dredging — say that the government should cover the costs.

"If private donations do it this time," asked Gary Hill, whose tugboat runs aground, "then who's going to keep it going?"

Hill owns the William B., a 77-foot tug converted for recreational use that is moored between Bay Island and Lido Isle. Any time there is a low tide of 1 foot or less, he says the ship is stuck.

Even if he were to give, Hill's boat sits in an area low on the city's priority list. The most shallow and publicly trafficked areas were prioritized, as were contaminated spots.

Federal funds were allocated to the critical zones, including the city's anchorage.

Other permitted places are the middle of the channel between the Balboa Peninsula and Balboa Island; the area along the south edge of the Balboa Bay Club & Resort; and the area around the Coast Guard station.

Some boaters have questioned if donors would get their preferred areas dredged first.

City spokeswoman Tara Finnigan said that all of the money would be kept in the same "pot," and the dredging would proceed in the order of priority, regardless of who gives donations.

That leaves city leaders in a predicament. Unlike the Upper Newport Bay, which is used mainly by local wildlife and draws broad support, the lower bay is a cauldron of interests tied to more specific locations.

Homeowners on Linda Isle, for instance, are hemmed in by some of the most shallow parts of the bay.

Still, a navigable harbor theoretically benefits all: property values, tour boat operators, bayfront restaurants and, ultimately, municipal coffers.

"Yes, it's nice to contribute something that benefits your backyard," Miller said. "But it'd be a benefit to everybody ... we're all in the harbor together — swimming, fishing, sailing, etc."

Historically, the city's revenues gained from leasing waterfront land, and harbor permits fall well short of its maintenance costs, including dredging. Also, federal officials view the site as a pleasure harbor, not a working waterway, so it falls low on the federal government's priority list.

Officials say they are appealing to peoples' sense of civic duty.

As the city scraps together funds and approvals, the Port of Long Beach is relying on Newport's contaminated sediment to use as landfill on its major construction site. Port and city officials agreed on a March 14 deadline.

Newport cannot begin dredging without the Army corps because the project is permitted under federal guidelines.

What's more, the Army corps has a holdup in the bidding process, Miller says. The low bidder on the project, DDM Crane and Rigging, failed to meet the small-business contracting requirements.

That company is affiliated with Dutra Dredging, the group that recently completed the Rhine Channel and still has its equipment in the harbor. A new dredging outfit will take even more time to get its barges and cranes into place.

Miller said there's a chance they could exceed the Long Beach date, but he was not sure.